DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 543 FL 001 419

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TITLE	Verbal Aspects in Germanic, Slavic, and Baltic.
INSTITUTION	Linguistic Society of America, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	49
NOTE	8p.
JOURNAL CIT	Language; v25 p402-409 1949
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Diachronic Linguistics, *Form Classes (Languages), German, Grammar, *Indo European Languages, *Language Classification, Language Patterns, Linguistics, Polish, Russian, Serbocroatian, Slavic Languages, *Verbs

ABSTRACT

This study examines the theory of Prokosch concerning the Germanic-Slavic-Baltic tense and aspect systems. The interrelatedness and influence of languages and dialects in Slavic (Russian and Old Church Slavic), Baltic (Lithuanian), and Germanic (Old High German and Gothic) are demonstrated. Examples illustrating the use of the perfective present to express future action in Gothic, Old High German, and Old Church Slavic lead the author to theorize on the tense and aspect systems in terms of their possible Proto-Indo-European origins. (RL)

From: LANGUAGE Journal of the Linguistic Society of America,
Volume 25 1949

ED047543

VERBAL ASPECTS IN GERMANIC, SLAVIC, AND BALTIC

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The problem of verbal aspects received very little attention in Prokosch's Comparative Germanic Grammar[1]—only two and a half pages; and what is said there is phrased in vague generalities. Nothing definite is given referring specifically to Germanic languages. The Bibliographical Notes, which are quite abundant for other chapters, have not a single reference to this section of the book. This is in utter contrast with Behaghel's treatment of the subject, who in his Deutsche Syntax[2] devotes two and a half pages (printed in very small type) exclusively to bibliographical references, more than half of them dealing with perfective and imperfective aspects in Gothic, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old English, Middle High German, and Netherlandish. Additional bibliographical references can be found in C. R. Goedsche's article on verbal aspect in German,[3] and in the recent book by R. H. Ružić.[4]

Prokosch's exposition contains several statements which are either misleading in their implications or definitely wrong. In one place we read that the Slavic languages possess a well-defined preterit, but that in colloquial speech this is quite commonly superseded by the present. The implication is that in this respect Slavic behaves differently from classical Latin or standard English or German. It is probably necessary to point out here that there is no one single aspect system uniformly observed in all Slavic languages, and that quite frequently the specific use of a certain aspect form is to be considered a stylistic preference rather than a grammatical rule. The system of verbal aspects observed in Old Church Slavic is in principle identical with that now operating in Great Russian, Ukrainian, White Russian, and Polish. On the other hand, modern Serbo-Croatian has a number of innovations, as can be seen from the excellent treatise on this subject by Ružić.[5] Serbo-Croatian has certain usages of present-tense forms for the expression of past action which do not occur in other Slavic languages. Apparently Prokosch was not referring to Serbo-Croatian when he made the above-mentioned statement. Since elsewhere he quotes only Russian forms, we are safe in assuming that in this case too he was thinking of Russian.

[1] E. Prokosch, A comparative Germanic grammar (Philadelphia, 1939). The chapter on tense and aspect is on pp. 144–6.

[2] Otto Behaghel, Deutsche Syntax 2.93–5 (Heidelberg, 1924).

[3] JEGP 33.506–19 (1934).

[4] Rajko Hariton Ružić, The aspects of the verb in Serbo-Croatian (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1943). [Cf. the review in Lg. 19.272–5.] Two recent European publications deserve mention here: Hens Holt, Études d'aspect (Acta Jutlandica 15.2; Copenhagen, 1943), reviewed by Oswald Szemerényi in Études Slaves et Roumaines 1.194–8; Carl Göran Regnéll, Über den Ursprung des slavischen Verbalaspektes (Lund, 1944), reviewed by Szemerényi ibid. 1.55–8.

[5] See also Milan Rešetar, Elementar-Grammatik der serbischen (kroatischen) Sprache, 2d ed. (Zagreb, 1922); A Meillet and A. Vaillant, Grammaire de la langue serbo-croate (Paris, 1924).

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Russian, however, uses the present tense for the past only in the so-called historical present, a usage which in German and Latin is at least as common as in Russian.

When stating that the Slavic preterit is quite commonly superseded by the present, Prokosch may have had in mind stylistic constructions like those which I had pointed out in Vol. 3 of Studi Baltici[6] and which had been explained by Doroszewski in Vol. 10 of Prace Filologiczne.[7] However, since only the perfective present is involved in those constructions, we have actually to do with the future tense (perfective) used to express past action. This specifically Slavic phenomenon was taken over by the Lithuanians, who substituted their own future tense for the Slavic (Polish and Russian) so-called perfective present. There are mainly two types of this use, both brought about by a strong urge to intensify the linguistic expression, especially to emphasize the sudden, momentary, flash-like character of an action or happening. From the abundance of examples available I quote but one to illustrate the first type: *Výras, išẽjęs iš kantrýbės, kad spir̃s kója, šuniùkas stačià gálva net apsìvertė* 'The man, having lost his patience, gave (the little dog) such a brutal kick with his foot that the little dog rolled over headlong.' In this type of sentence the future-tense form appears always in the main clause, which is followed by a consecutive clause.

The second type is an iterative conditional clause. The future-tense form of the verb opens the subordinate clause, which has no conjunction. The verb is always perfective: *Pralaimẽs kurìs*, ... 'Every time one (of the gamblers) would lose, ... ' Here the perfective future interrupts suddenly, like a flash of lightning, the humdrum of a restful situation. The verb so placed (opening the clause) always designates a momentary height of action (a highlight as it were) arising suddenly out of a dull monotony. The conclusion of these conditional sentences is always given in the present tense. However, such conditional clauses with the verb in the future tense are used not only to express past action, but also for present action. The use of these two constructions is a question of style and not of basic grammar.

It is wrong to assume that the consciousness of a Russian or a Polish speaker 'does not require those tense distinctions that we consider indispensable'. In Russian and Polish, aspect distinctions are not more essential than tense distinctions. The two systems belong together and are interlaced. Differences of chronology, especially between present and future, but also between present and past, are far more keenly felt and more rigidly expressed in Russian and Polish than in German, and differences of aspect are expressed within the tenses. There is a perfective and an imperfective future tense, but there is only one present tense, namely an imperfective. To be sure, the analytic linguist, who is guided by the phonetic form, says that in Russian the perfective present tense has future meaning and in doing so he groups the perfective future together with the present tense. To a native Russian speaker, however, in whose mind the meaning is uppermost, such a grouping appears unsatisfactory. Here is a simple

[6] Zum Gebrauch der Aktionsarten im Litauischen, Studi Baltici 3.80–92 (1933).

[7] Witold Doroszewski, O znaczeniu dokonanem osnów czasownikowych, Prace Filologiczne 10.192–309 (1926).

Russian sentence given (1) in the present tense, (2) in the perfective future, (3) in the imperfective future:

(1) *ja smotr'ú v oknó* 'I am looking through the window'
(2) *ja posmotr'ú v oknó* 'I shall look (once) through the window'
(3) *ja búdu smotrél' v oknó* 'I shall look through the window (repeatedly, habitually)'

The native Russian always associates sentence 2 with sentence 3, irrespective of the fact that Nos. 1 and 2 differ from each other only very slightly in their phonetic form and not at all in their inflection. To the Russian, sentences 2 and 3 have something in common that is absent in 1, namely the same tense. He is not so much impressed by the fact that 1 and 3 have the same aspect (imperfective). The native Russian is more tense-conscious than aspect-conscious, and the same is true of the Pole.

The Old Church Slavic verbal system differs from the one just described in the expression of past action. For this it has two tenses, an imperfect and an aorist, which represent at the same time two different aspects. Normally the aorist appears in the perfective aspect and the imperfect in the imperfective aspect. In the expression of past action, Old Church Slavic agrees very closely with classical and Hellenistic Greek, except that it has no special tense corresponding to the Greek-perfect. Having two past tenses, it comes closer to Italic than Germanic does with its single past tense. The development in Russian and Polish was to give up both Old Slavic past tenses and to replace them with a single new formation. While of the two Old Slavic past tenses each has only one aspect, the new Russian and Polish past tense combines both aspects. In the expression of present and future action, Old Church Slavic agrees with Russian and Polish.

I am forced to disagree with Prokosch's statement that 'Balto-Slavic emphasized more and more the comparatively objective element of aspect, while the Western languages, particularly Italic and Germanic, developed the more subjective tense factor to such an extent that the aspects were largely obscured, although later partly reintroduced by secondary formations.' This statement is at variance with the actual facts. The expression Balto-Slavic must have been used by Prokosch unthinkingly, as it is so frequently used: it should be clear by now that Baltic and Slavic are two separate members of the Indo-European family and that there never was a Balto-Slavic unity.[8] In this special case, the collective term Balto-Slavic was especially unsuitable. One of the principal differences between Baltic and Slavic lies in the fact that the Baltic languages have preserved the Indo-European -*s*- future, while no Slavic language has any trace of it, although Slavic literature begins 700 years earlier than that of the Lithu-

[8] Cf. my article On the degree of kinship between Slavic and Baltic, The Slavonic and East European Review 20.251–65. Oswald Szemerényi's article Sur l'unité linguistique balto-slave, Études Slaves et Roumaines 1.65–85, 159–73 (1948), brings into the discussion a few interesting arguments which seem to favor the traditional theory. Some of the similarities mentioned there can be explained as borrowings. Others need further discussion. Szemerényi wrote his study in 1944 without knowledge of mine.

anians, Letts, and Old Prussians (the Old Prussian Elbing Glossary does not count here since it presents no connected speech).

Outwardly, the Lithuanian aspect system is the same as the Russian.[9] The distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect is strictly observed, and the same types of perfective and imperfective aspects occur here as well as there.

The Russian verbal aspects can be divided in the following way:

Perfective	1. Inchoative action	Point action
	2. Momentary action	
	3. Effective action	Completed action
	4. Limited duration	
Imperfective	5. Simple imperfective or single-occurrence imperfective action	
	6. Iterative action	

The basic form of the Russian verbal system is the single-occurrence imperfective verb (type 5). The perfective types (with some exceptions in types 2 and 3) are derived from type 5 by means of verbal prefixes. In this classification, types 1 and 4 are especially characteristic. Most verbs of type 1 are derived from type 5 by means of the prefix *za-* (*plákat'* 'to weep' : *zaplákat'* 'to start to weep'), but not all verbs that have the prefix *za-* are inchoative. All verbs of type 4 (with the exception of *podo-ždát'* 'to wait a while') are derived from the basic type 5 by means of the prefix *po-* (*govorít'* 'to talk' : *pogovorít'* 'to talk a while', *stoját'* 'to stand' : *postoját'* 'to stand a while'), but not every verb having this prefix expresses limited duration. Most verbs of type 2 are perfective by nature, without the help of any prefix. The great majority of the perfective verbs are of type 3. They are derived from the basic imperfective type 5 by means of any available prefix, including *za-* and *po-*. However, there are also a few verbs of this type which are perfective by nature, without a prefix. Type 6 includes primary and secondary iteratives. The secondary iteratives are derived from perfective verbs (but only from types 1–3, not from type 4) by means of changes in the stem, while keeping the prefix of the corresponding perfective formations. It should be pointed out here that the Russian inchoatives represent a type of perfective verbs that do not express completed action ('vollendete Handlung'), but only point action ('punktuelle Aktionsart'). Consequently, the definition given by Newald[10] for 'perfektive Aktionsart' ('in bezug auf die Vollendung') does not apply to Russian. In Russian, the division between perfective and imperfective verbs is based on the fact that not all verbs can express action going on in the present. Both types of verbs have present-tense forms, but only the present-tense forms of imperfective verbs function as a true present tense, while the present-tense forms of perfective verbs have the meaning and function of a future tense.

[9] A description of the Lithuanian practice is given in my Kleine litauische Sprachlehre 238–42 (Heidelberg, 1929), and in more detailed form, comparing it with Germanic and Slavic, in Studi Baltici 3.80–92.

[10] Richard Newald, Einführung in die deutsche Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft 141 (Lahr, 1947).

The existence of a separate Russian type of inchoative action formed with the prefix *za-* had already been recognized by the Russian grammarian Deržavin, who distinguishes[10a] four verbal aspects: (1) inchoative (načal'nyj vid), (2) imperfective (nesoveršënnyj vid), (3) imperfective iterative (nesoveršënnyj mnogokratnyj vid), (4) perfective (soveršënnyj vid). Deržavin's inchoative aspect is made up exclusively of verbs with prefixed *za-*, thus corresponding to my type 1, while his perfective aspect includes types 2–4 of my classification.

An inchoative type formed with the prefix *za-* is also very common in Serbo-Croatian, as can be ascertained by glancing through the vocabulary of Karl H. Meyer and A. Stojićević's Serbo-kroatisches Lesebuch (Göttingen, 1927). A few examples will suffice: *bòljeti* 'to hurt' : *zabòljeti* 'to start to hurt', *drijèmati* 'to slumber' : *zadrijèmati* 'to fall into a slumber', *vládati* 'to rule' : *zavládati* 'to start to rule, to conquer'. It is clear that this type originated in the Proto-Slavic period.

Lithuanian has the same general types of verbal aspect as Russian. However, in contrast to Polish and Russian, Lithuanian has both aspects in all basic tenses, including the present tense; that is to say, the perfective present tense is not used to express future action. Moreover, there is no periphrastic future in Baltic, the *-s-* future being used for both aspects. As a result, there are three simple tenses (preterit, present, future), each of which forms both aspects. In addition, there is a so-called imperfectum consuetudinis, a past tense expressing habitual or iterative action. This tense, usually called imperfect, has only imperfective aspect, irrespective of the form of the verb. Any verb, whether it be perfective or imperfective in the preterit, present, and future, becomes iterative, i.e. a special type of imperfective, in this tense. Otherwise, the use of either the perfective or the imperfective aspect is subject to exactly the same rules as in the two neighboring Slavic languages. Even the choice of the verbal prefixes is in most cases identical. The general perfective prefix in Baltic is *pa-*, phonologically and functionally the same as Russian and Polish *po-*; there is almost complete agreement between the use of *pa-* in Lithuanian and *po-* in Russian, as can be verified by consulting any Lithuanian–Russian or Russian–Lithuanian dictionary. In a previous article[11] I have ventured the opinion that the system of verbal aspects as used in modern Lithuanian may have been borrowed from Slavic. And indeed it seems to be nothing but an incomplete reflex of the Russian system, a Russian shoot grafted upon the inherited tense system. In Lettish, where the Russian influence was much weaker than in Lithuanian, the aspect system is less developed than in Lithuanian.

In the quotation given above Prokosch places Germanic together with Italic and claims that the two developed the tense factor to such an extent that the aspects were largely obscured. This is true of Italic only, not of Germanic in its early stage. In the light of the factual situation observable in Gothic, Old High German, Old Saxon, Old English, and Middle High German, Prokosch's statement is unacceptable. As a matter of fact, in Gothic and Old High German we have very much the same picture as in modern Russian. For past action there

[10a] N. S. Deržavin, Učebnik russkoj grammatiki[4] 159–96 (Moscow–Petrograd, 1922).

[11] The Slavonic and East European Review 20.251–65.

is one tense with two aspects, perfective and imperfective. To express future action there are two tenses, the perfective present and a periphrastic future. In addition to this, there is a present tense for present action. The normal function of the perfective present was that of a future tense. The aspect system and its relationship with the tense system in Gothic, Old High German, and Middle High German has been made clear by Streitberg,[12] Mansion,[13] and Michels.[14] Doubting Thomases may be referred directly to the texts. Let them compare the Gothic Bible with its Greek original, and the various Old High German translations with their respective Latin sources. In the Old High German Isidor, they will find sentences like these: (*Ih*) *chidhuuingu dhir aerdriihhes hruomege* = Lat. *gloriosos terrę humiliabo*; *ih chifestinon* = *firmabo*; *ih aruuehhu* = *suscitabo*; *ih chistiftu* = *statuam, stabiliam*; *ih firchnussu* = *conteram*.

Some Germanic scholars readily concede perfectivizing force to the prefix *ge-* (*ga-*, *gi-*, *chi-*), but revolt against attributing the same force to other prefixes. However, the fact that in German the past participle of compound verbs does not have the prefix *ge-* shows that any prefix had perfectivizing force in Old High German and that therefore *ge-* was not needed, just as verbs which were perfective without a prefix, e.g. OHG *queman*, MHG *komen*, formed their past participle without any prefix. Of course, there may always be some prefixed forms which are not perfective, just as we have seen in the Slavic iteratives; but a special iterative type does not exist in Germanic. Nor is there a momentary aspect corresponding to the Russian type 2 or a form expressing limited duration (type 4). Perfective verbs in Old Germanic are mostly either inchoative (ingressive) or effective (resultative).

Those who refuse to believe in the existence, in Gothic and Old High German, of a verbal aspect system similar to the one in Old Church Slavic and Russian may be under the impression that the Slavic system is absolutely airtight and without exception, and since they do not find such absolute regularity in the Old Germanic dialects they deny the existence of such a Germanic system altogether. However, in view of the fact that language is not a mechanism in which each component part functions according to invariable laws, but rather a social organism whose parts may be changed at the will and whim of the speaker, we will not be surprised to find that in language there is no rule without exceptions. Indeed, language as an expression of the variable human mind is the very field where we should expect to see this axiom applied. The above description of the system of verbal aspects in Russian represents only the basic rules and trends. There are very significant exceptions, which can be grouped as follows.

(a) In a few cases the formation of the perfective is irregular: *brat'* : *vzjat'* 'to take', *věšat'* : *povésit'* 'to hang', *govorit'* : *skazát'* 'to say, to tell', *klast'* : *položit'* 'to put, to lay down', etc. This is an exception to the rule that the perfective verb is derived from the single-occurrence imperfective verb (type 5) by means of a prefix.

[12] Wilhelm Streitberg, Gotisches Elementarbuch[6] 194–203 (Heidelberg, 1920). For bibliography see also Wilhelm Braune, Gotische Grammatik[12] 128–33 (Halle a. d. Saale, 1927).

[13] Joseph Mansion, Althochdeutsches Lesebuch[2] 46–8 (Heidelberg, 1932).

[14] Victor Michels, Mittelhochdeutsches Elementarbuch[4] 197–200 (Heidelberg, 1921).

(b) There are a few compound verbs which are always imperfective (type 5) in spite of the prefix with which they are formed: *výgljadet'* 'to appear, to look (like)', *zavíset'* 'to depend on', *nadéjat'sja* 'to hope', *prinadležát'* 'to belong to', *sostoját'* 'to consist of'. Because of the characteristically durative meaning of these verbs there are no corresponding perfectives.

(c) Verbs ending in *-írovat'* (*importírovat'* 'to import', *likvidírovat'* 'to liquidate', *telefonírovat'* 'to telephone') are both perfective and imperfective.

(d) There are a number of verbs which are perfective by nature, without having a prefix. We call them primary perfectives. Each of these primary perfectives is accompanied by an independent imperfective form which differs from the corresponding perfective in its conjugation and may even be from a different root. Examples: *brósit'* : *brosát'* 'to throw', *dat'* : *davát'* 'to give', *kupít'* : *pokupát'* 'to buy', *leč'* : *ložít'sja*, 'to lie down', *sest'* : *sadít'sja* 'to sit down', *stat'* : *stanovít'sja* 'to take up a standing position'.

(e) There are a few irregular patterns in the formation of secondary iteratives, e.g. *zasnút'* : *zasypát'* 'to fall asleep', *prosnút'sja* : *prosypát'sja* 'to wake up', *otdochnút'* : *otdychát'* 'to rest', *predložít'* : *predlagát'* 'to offer', *upomjanút'* : *upominát'* 'to mention'.

In spite of these exceptions in the system of verbal aspects in Russian, nobody will deny the existence of the system itself. By the same token, the irregularities in the Old Germanic system do not justify the negation of the system itself. It will be a future task for us to recognize and explain those irregularities.

There is an interesting difference between Old High German and Gothic in the use of the perfective present participle, although both languages agree in using the perfective present as a future. Streitberg has shown that in Gothic the perfective present participle translates the Greek aorist participle. *gahausjands* occurs 37 times for *ἀκούσας* and *hausjands* 14 times for *ἀκούων*. In Old High German, at least in Tatian, the perfective present participle may have future meaning and corresponds to the Latin formation in *-tūrus*, as is shown by the following examples.

quid est factum, quia nobis manifestaturus es te ipsum? (John 14.22) = Tatian *waz ist gitān, bithiu wanta uns gioffanonti bist thih selbon?*

significans qua esset morte moriturus (John 18.29) = Tatian *gizeihanonti welihhemo tode was sterbenti.*

Otherwise, Gothic and Old High German represent very much the same picture as Old Church Slavic, especially in the use of the perfective present to express future action. Consequently Germanic cannot be placed together with Italic. Of course, Latin has had a strong influence on German syntax, especially since the Middle Ages, and increasingly since the period of Humanism. The reform in Latin studies at that time destroyed a great deal of German syntax. The loss of the consciousness of aspect differences is directly due to Latin influence, which of course had started already in the Old High German period. The Latin influence on German and English is comparable to the Russian influence on Lithuanian taking place at the same time.

The generally held view that the combination of tense and aspect as it appears in Greek represents fairly closely the conditions of Proto-Indo-European may be

right. In that case, the Germanic-Slavic-Baltic aspect system with the sharp contrast between perfective and imperfective must be considered as an innovation. It does not appear in Greek or any other Indo-European language. I have already expressed my opinion that the Baltic aspect system must be borrowed from Russian. Therefore, it remains only to establish the relationship between Slavic and Germanic. If both groups inherited this system from Proto-Indo-European, we are forced to assume that Pre-Germanic and Pre-Slavic lived more closely together than has been believed since Leskien's famous study on the declension in Baltic, Slavic, and Germanic. If we refuse to give up Leskien's view in this matter, there is no other answer than to consider the system in one group borrowed from the other. In answering the question whether this aspect system originated in the Slavic or in the Germanic group, it must be kept in mind that our Gothic documents were written 500 years earlier than the Old Church Slavic gospel translation. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the entire Slavic area was for some time under Gothic domination. A strong linguistic influence exerted by the Goths is evident from the numerous loan words in the Slavic languages. Therefore, it is not improbable that the Slavs received the aspect system from the Goths and passed it on to the Baltic people.

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